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ABSTRACT

In his speech on Founder's Day at Minnesota Metropolitan State College, the U.S. Commissioner of Education praises the experimental college for its innovative approach to higher education. Minnesota Metropolitan is providing such flexibility in departing from the traditional place and schedule of academic studies, in departing from the traditional age requirements for students, and in departing from the traditional preconceptions of higher education--studies isolated from the realities of daily life and all too often unrelated to the needs of the individual student or to the needs of the society in which he lives. (HS)

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NEW PATTERNS IN HIGHER EDUCATION*

By S. P. Marland, Jr.
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Things that are done repeatedly usually are carried out according to a certain kind of ritual or formula --- and we are not always certain why. Neitzsche argued that a tradition grows more venerable in direct proportion to the remoteness and confusion of its origin, finally, if it lasts long enough, becoming holy and inspiring awe.

Thus, as I prepared to address you on this first Founder's Day of Minnesota Metropolitan State College, I began flexing the lobe of my brain which is stocked with Founder's Day opening comments, searching for those phrases so polished by time and so often expressed that the audience can settle down to the event, recognizing that nothing unexpected will be uttered this day. This rhetoric usually has to do with ivy-covered buildings, shaded walks, kissing rock, and the other physical facts of campus existence.

But hardly had I blown the dust off the first series of four-syllable adjectives when I realized that the language would not do --- not for this particular Founder's Day and emphatically not in connection with MMSC on any day. No ivy-covered buildings. No shaded walks. No kissing rock. In fact, no campus. The plain fact appears to be that MMSC has flagrantly rejected and discarded all of the traditions which most of us habitually associate with

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higher education save one --- and that single exception is education itself. It further appears that Chancellor Mitau, President Sweet, the legislators of this State and the faculty and students of MMSC hold themselves ready to try what appears to be workable and useful --- and to reject anything that fails to do the job --- in their search for the kind of higher education that they believe the Twin Cities metropolitan area people want and can use.

I think Neitzsche would be greatly pleased. I know I am. For it is not often that I have had the pleasure of observing an educational experiment that is so clearly appropriate as your traditionless college, and, despite its brief existence and complicated start-up problems, operating so efficiently and hopefully. You have recognized and acted upon your perception of the necessity for change in the functions and purpose of higher education in America, the same recognition expressed so well by President Alan Pifer in his opening statement in the 1971 annual report of the Carnegie Corporation.

"There is a growing body of responsible, well-informed people," Dr. Pifer writes, "both on and off campus, who believe the time has come for substantial changes in higher education. Among these people there is now a questioning of once sacrosanct practices, a new willingness to experiment, a new interest in the needs of students, and a new concern for those who have been denied access to higher education or have not been reached by the conventional system."

Considering the extraordinarily inventive nature of the institution that you have established, it is probably not necessary that you read Dr. Pifer's entire statement, but I will recommend it anyway. It is good reading and, moreover, pertinent reading for it is addressed to a problem of definition and design that all America seems concerned with --- what higher education in this country amounts to today, and what we expect it to become.

Dr. Pifer is not alone in his questioning, of course. The problems that afflict higher education have been exhaustively documented --- in such work as the Newman Report which was financed by the Ford Foundation and published by HEW, the various Carnegie Commission studies, the investigations of Reisman and Jencks, and many others.

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, for example, has studied the situation and reported that of every 100 persons who enter college, only 53 percent earn bachelor's degrees; of the 30 percent who enter graduate school, only 19 earn a master's; of the 8 percent who enter doctoral programs, only 4 percent eventually earn the Ph.D.

And so we face a situation in which a college degree is held out as the sine qua non of success in American life, a precious ticket to job security, intellectual satisfaction, manicured lawns, barbecues, and other suburban pleasures --- and, to a degree, this is undoubtedly the case.

And yet, despite the unquestioned value of a college degree and despite the mounting pressures upon the contemporary youngster, especially middle-class children, to seek one, we find approximately

800,000 young men and women dropping out of college every year, presumably finding the experience unrelated to their concept of what life should be.

The Newman Report noted that "laymen are generally astonished to hear that most students who attend college never finish. Educators themselves are often surprised when confronted with the numbers involved." Many students leave college for personal reasons, the Report states, such as shortage of money or the desire to get a job. "But the majority of dropouts," the Report adds, "cite dissatisfaction with college and the desire to reconsider personal goals and interests as the major reasons for leaving school." They leave, in sum, because college fails to seize their attention and engage their enthusiasm.

But the Newman Report found as good reason to be concerned about some college students who don't drop out but might be better off if they did, at least for a while. These are the drifters who go from campus to campus, particularly in the large State systems, apparently with no clear idea of where they're headed, deferring any real decisions about their lives while they enjoy a minimum of responsibility and a maximum of socializing. Unfortunately for the drifters, the times and our economic system demonstrate an increasing tendency to deal harshly with such improvidence. We do not yet live in an age of lotus eaters.

The common denominator for both dropout and drifter is isolation from the world beyond the campus and contempt for it and fear of it. Many students go to college because the only thing

they've ever experienced is a classroom. A generation or so ago, the faculty could provide a perspective about the world, but the current emphasis on continuing one's graduate studies without interruption and then getting a faculty post immediately has the effect of further isolating academe: the young faculty don't know much more about the world than their students. Even summer jobs and work-study arrangements, which might offer a new viewpoint, tend either to be makework or only disconnected jobs unrelated to academic interests --- occupations that the students wouldn't dream of seeking after graduation.

What all this suggests to me, and to the critics I have cited, is that higher education, after years of relative immunity, is today in deep trouble, uninteresting and irrelevant to many. The 50 percent who drop out and probably many more who don't simply reject what is offered. And those who <u>do</u> get a bachelor's degree frequently discover that it has small appeal to prospective employers, a career dilemma that is of central importance to any schemes for a new order. Postsecondary education should be made to fit career aspirations and requirements far more consciously and systematically than is now the case.

Clearly we need new patterns in higher education, alternative methods and systems that will compete peacefully with traditional techniques, offering solutions to problems that defy conventional wisdom. The open college, which Minnesota Metropolitan represents so well, is an extremely hopeful new initiative in higher education, indeed one of the most flexible and potentially useful of all the

schemes for alternative educational enterprises that have surfaced in the reform debate. I am extremely proud of the role, albeit limited, that the Office of Education has played in assisting you in launching this new enterprise. (Measured against the scale of our standard run of investments, grants to MMSC totaling $150,000 for curriculum development and training of community faculty must be considered limited --- though I expect the return on this public investment to be potentially unlimited.) Similarly exciting unorthodox activities are underway with or without Federal assistance. I am speaking of such programs as the University Without Walls, the new Empire State College of the State University of New York, the University of Nebraska's telecommunication program, and superb foreign examples of the genre such as the external degree program of the University of London --- closely resembling your own program --- and Britain's Open University which is coming to the United States for a trial in collaboration with Rutgers and other institutions.

These programs are offering flexible new ways to extend college to those who are not able to --- or do not choose to --- immerse themselves in the traditional college environment. These long-distance students presumably compensate for the handicap of physical separation by the intensity of their motivation and desire, that is, if they tend to think of separation as a handicap at all. I get the impression that the excessively "collegiate type" --- the big man on campus --- is on the way out and that off-campus learning such as offered by MMSC is looming large in the plans of

a lot of young people. One reason surely must be that the learner knows why he is where he is.

This form seems to tell us that where the student is physically located --- whether in his living room, at the feet of his Socratic professor, or perched on a flagpole --- is not the issue. In Australia and New Zealand, for example, external-degree programs have extended the reach of the university to young adults living in remote, inaccessible sheep stations! A passion for learning, even a modest interest in learning, will assert itself no matter what the student's physical surroundings or methods used to convey his instruction. In a technology experiment, the Office of Education is collaborating with NASA to beam educational radio broadcasts to remote Alaskan villages by means of a satellite --- and I'll lay odds that the curriculum is just as attentively received --- from presumably the most gifted teacher available --- after its long electronic journey through space as it would be from the typical teacher's lips.

As President Sweet is fond of saying, it does not matter where you learn it, or how you learn it. The question is: do you know it and can use it? Minnesota Metropolitan State College, with the forceful and inspirational leadership of Dr. Sweet, is helping its small but steadily growing student clientele to know and to use the knowledge and learning that those men and women have decided in their own minds that they want --- and this kind of student-designed and directed curriculum seems to me to be one of the very best answers to the problems of irrelevance and disinterest

that plague so many of our more traditional institutions. And the contractual arrangements that MMSC concludes with each student convinces me further that each student will clearly understand his objectives and be able to track his own progress from beginning to end. As Dr. Ernest L. Boyer, Chancellor of the State University fo New York, has said, "The overarching need is more flexibility --- flexibility as to where a student studies, what he studies, when he does it, and how much time he needs to complete his education."

Minnesota Metropolitan is providing such flexibility --- in departing from the traditional place and schedule of academic studies, in departing from the traditional age requirements for students (I understand yours range from 21 to 60) and, perhaps most of all, in departing from the traditional preconceptions of higher education --- studies isolated from the realities of daily life and all too often unrelated to the needs of the individual student or to the needs of the society in which he lives. Your concern is frankly and proudly to heal our wounded metropolitan culture and to enrich and enliven it for the thousands of residents of the Twin Cities area. By involving other social institutions --- the family and home, the church, the communications media, industry and government --- you are weaving your enterprise directly into the fabric of your community and, I am convinced, assuring the success of its purpose.

Minnesota Metropolitan was conceived as a bold experiment --- an experiment that would not so much reject the existing

forms of higher education as question their capacity to meet the growing popular demand for postsecondary education in an America in which the elitist concept of college was rapidly fading into the past. And as proponents of the open college concept, with flexible student-designed curriculum, sensitive to the needs and desires of a late 20th century metropolitan culture, and open to all qualified by desire and competence, I would say that you have proved your case. I would suggest that your institution can no longer be considered experimental, or be spoken of as an interesting alternative to present forms of postsecondary schooling, but that it should be known for what it is --- a permanent, growing, future-oriented institution-in-being.

Thank you for having me today, and please remember to invite me to Founder's Day a decade or so in the future when we will all be entitled to reminisce a bit about the splendid traditions of Minnesota Metropolitan State College --- the traditions of service and competence and purposeless that you are busy building today. Or perhaps there will not need to be a Founder's Day in the new and different traditions of this institution --- just old friends dropping in to celebrate.

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